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Condemned pastor still alive at Easter

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — As Christians around the world celebrated Easter, condemned Iranian pastor Yousef Nadarkhani remained in jail — alive, but having already passed his 900th day behind bars for being a Christian and still facing a possible execution.

Nadarkhani was able to visit with one of his sons on the son's April 2 birthday, according to the American Center for Law and Justice which is closely monitoring the case. His 900th day in jail occurred in late March.

For weeks now, rumors have floated on Facebook and Twitter that he has been executed, with a picture of a body often accompanying the post. The picture was taken well over a year ago of an-

other person, and it's highly unlikely Iran would take a picture of Nadarkhani if he was executed, said Jordan Sekulow, executive director of the American Center for Law and Justice.

"We're able to confirm that he's alive pretty regularly, at least weekly," Sekulow told Baptist Press.

Rumors of Nadarkhani's execution are often easily dismissed, Sekulow said, particularly if a rumor starts on the weekend. That's because the Iranian government shuts down around mid-Thursday and doesn't reopen again until Sunday in recognition of the Muslim calendar.

"They won't send out pictures [of Nadarkhani]," Sekulow said. "He is not someone who is on trial

for being a spy. Those are the pictures of people we usually see. He is not one of those public executions."

Nadarkhani was sentenced to death in 2010 for converting from Islam to Christianity, in a case that began in 2009.

The United States, United Kingdom, and other countries have spoken out publicly for Nadarkhani, pressuring Iran. Among those other countries is Brazil which, unlike the U.S. and the U.K., has close ties to Iran. That gives Brazil leverage, said Sekulow, who visited Brazil earlier this year to discuss the case with Brazilian officials.



see NADARKHANI on p. 8

NADARKHANI

SBC messenger cards available

The 2012 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) will be held June 19-20, at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans. Most Mississippi Baptist churches are using the online registration process at www.sbc.net to register their messengers for the Convention. Churches that choose not to register messengers through the online process may contact Brenda Box for registration cards at Executive Administration, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, (601) 292-3201 or toll-free outside of Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 201. E-mail: bbox@mbcb.org.

SBC messenger cards are required in order to participate in the business sessions of the annual meeting and are mailed only by church request. For additional information, contact Brenda Box at the above telephone numbers or e-mail.

Southern Baptists lose rep on U.S. commission

Land to rotate off USCIRF after two terms of service

WASHINGTON (BP) — Southern Baptists are losing representation on the U.S. Commission on International Re-

ligious Freedom (USCIRF) as Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, rotates off the commission after serving two terms.

Land began his service in 2001 but was off nearly a year before being reappointed to the commission in 2005.

USCIRF is a bipartisan panel chosen by the president and congressional leaders that advises the White House, U.S.

State Department and U.S. Congress on the condition of religious freedom overseas. Among its responsibilities is to recommend to the State Department gov-
ernments that it be
Countries of Partic-
ular Concern (PCs), a
designation reserve
violators of religi-
ous freedom.

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Mississippians use arts for Christ

CHRISTIAN PERFORMING ARTS FESTIVAL Participants in the 2012 Mississippi Baptist Performing Arts Festival check out one of the displays at the festival, which was held this year at Highland Colony Church in Ridgeland. Approximately 500 people from several states attended the annual event, which included instructive presentations on puppetry, clowning, drama, interpretative movement, and media. The 2013 Christian Performing Arts Festival will be held Feb. 22-23 at Ridgecrest Church, Madison.

The festival is supported by gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)



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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS



AT THE WHITE HOUSE — U.S. President Barack Obama addresses attendees at the 2012 Easter Prayer Breakfast at The White House. No Southern Baptists were invited. (Photo courtesy of The White House)

Snubbed, or not?

It is wonderful to see so many good friends here today. To all the faith leaders from all across the country — from churches and congregations large and small; from different denominations and different backgrounds — thank you for coming to our third annual Easter prayer breakfast.

Thus U.S. President Barack Obama opened this year's Easter prayer breakfast event at The White House with a greeting to "faith leaders from all across the country." Only, there was no one there from the nation's largest Protestant denomination. No Southern Baptists were invited.

Rabble-rouser Al Sharpton was invited. So were Cardinal Donald Wuerl of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.; Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Church; and Sharon Watkins, president of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. (By the way, those names were brought to the surface thanks to some enterprising reporters, because The White House refused to release the full list of invitees.)

Southern Baptists are probably not high on the President's list of invitees to any event at The White House, given the corporate and individual criticism he has endured from us for many of his key proposals such as universal health care and the mandate to provide free, abortion-causing contraceptives to one and all.

However, this was not a pick-up game on The White House basketball court. This was a national prayer breakfast where he formally thanked religious leaders for the Christian-based ministries their congregants administer around the country.

"I'm even more grateful for the work that you do every day of the year — the compassion and the kindness that so many of you express through your

various ministries," said The President in the official transcript of his remarks. "I know that some of you have joined with our Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. I've seen firsthand some of the outstanding work that you are doing in your respective communities, and it's an incredible expression of your faith. And I know that all of us who have an opportunity to work with you draw inspiration from the work that you do."

No one from Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, for example, was there to hear those remarks, although that ministry of volunteers, reaching out to those in their time of need regardless of religious or political affiliation, is known as the best in the nation.

"It appears that the Obama administration is more interested in the views of race-baiting, black liberation theology spokesmen like Jeremiah Wright and Al Sharpton than those of mainstream, evangelical Christians," said Robert Jeffress, senior pastor of First Church, Dallas, in an interview with Fox News.

To not invite leaders of the nation's largest Protestant denomination to the White House Easter Prayer Breakfast is more evidence of this administration's tin ear toward evangelical Christians," he said.

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville and a frequent guest at The White House in years past, had a different take on the whole matter.

"My feelings are not hurt," Land said in the same Fox News article, noting that The White House is free to invite or, in this case, to not invite whomever they choose to events held there.

So, who's right? You decide.

'Green' an unrealistic dream?

The desire for renewable or "green" energy seems good and rational. Many believe that such an approach to our power needs will produce new green jobs and lower pollution.

Consequently, at least 29 states have adopted renewable portfolio standards which require some minimum percentage of their electricity to come from renewable. All of this seems admirable but despite the propaganda, you still can't squeeze blood from a turnip.

The reality is that there is only so much that we can really expect to gain from green energy. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, if we add all of the wind, solar, and hydroelectric power produced in our country, we have a grand total of three percent of our power from them. This is not likely to change for decades, since the difficulties that have to be overcome are nowhere near being realized.

Even more stunning is the realization that, as documented in a recent study by the Manhattan Institute, green energy is more expensive — at least 25% more expensive — than gas, coal, and nuclear power. Just as amazing, biomass and ethanol actually pollute more than gasoline. The Environmental Protection Agency reported in 2007 that using more ethanol will increase the amounts of volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides in the air.

By the way, green jobs aren't working out too well, either. Spain found that one green job (which is always government subsidized) costs two real jobs. Italy found that one green job costs as much as six regular jobs.

In addition to being more expensive, it has always been difficult to explain exactly what a green job is. Just recently the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics came up with a new definition that includes the production not only of green goods and services, but also of anything that aids the overall process of environmental improvement — including operating the bulldozers and cranes used to install wind turbines and making and transporting and pouring the concrete in which they're embedded — though none of these is called a green job when applied to, say, erecting an office building.

In 2010, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that only 2.4% of total U.S. employment was green jobs. Of these, 2.3 million were from the private



Guest opinion
with Craig V. Mitchell

sector. The other 860,000 came from government (at all levels).

It is good and important to have dreams, but when we mistake our dreams for reality we find ourselves in a great deal of trouble. The politicians who make these mandates are going to make out OK, as well as the investors in green enterprises.

Let's take for example the people who invested in Solyndra. Though Solyndra went bankrupt, leaving taxpayers with a half-billion dollar debt, its chief investors and owners got their cash out before they lost it. There have been lots more Solyndras, and more are coming. Every time, the average Joe who works for a living and pays his bills gets hit — hard.

All of this regulation for more green energy has the same effect as a regressive tax, meaning the less you make, the higher percentage of your income you pay. That does not help the poor, whom the Christian faith requires us always to remember (Galatians 2:10).

Pushing mandates such as renewable portfolio standards might increase green energy use and create more green jobs, but how many people will it impoverish? How many jobs will it destroy?

While looking at the alleged benefits of the technology, we must also look at its costs. To ignore them is not just wrong, it's immoral.

Mitchell is associate professor of Christian ethics and director of the Land Center for Cultural Engagement at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth. He also is senior fellow of the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, and has testified before Congressional committees in Washington, D.C. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press.

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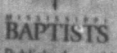
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Cuban Baptists flourishing

Christians worship faithfully, aware of watchful government

HAVANA, Cuba (BP) — Walking through the Western Cuba Baptist Convention (WCBC) Seminary's corridors in Havana, Kevin Ezell heard how home missionaries Herbert Caudill and David Fite were escorted from those halls in 1965 and sent to Fidel Castro's notorious prison.

The pair, along with 53 Cuban pastors and lay leaders, were accused of being CIA operatives, yet their only crime was sharing the Gospel.

"Their sacrifices were incredible," said Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board (formerly the Home Mission Board — HMB), as he reflected upon the missionaries' ordeal in the years following the Castro-led revolution.

The two men remained in prison until their release in 1969.

Ezell's March 21-23 visit, on the eve of Pope Benedict's official stopover on the Caribbean island nation, marked the first time an HMB/NAMB president had visited Cuba since William Tanner traveled there in 1978, more than three decades ago.

Ezell was in Cuba as a guest of the Florida Baptist Convention to attend the Western Cuba Baptist Convention's annual meeting at historic Calvary Baptist Church in downtown Havana. The building — located around the block from the country's capital building — originally was purchased through Annie Armstrong Mission Offering funds.

Traveling with Ezell were John Sullivan, Florida's executive director-treasurer, who preached during the WCBC annual meeting; Carlos Ferrer, NAMB vice president and chief financial officer; and Florida convention staff members Craig Culbreth and Dennis Wilbanks.

The Florida Baptist Convention has partnered with WCBC since 1996 and funds 51% of its annual operating budget, earmarking more than \$1.8 million for the past 15 years to underwrite pastoral salary assistance, theological education, and leader training.

For Ezell and Ferrer, the trip was an opportunity to see the foundation established by Southern Baptists' Home Mission Board when it first sent missionaries to the country in 1886.

The WCBC, organized in 1905, flourished under the HMB support. Through a letter-writing campaign by home missionary Annie Armstrong, the board purchased the Calvary Church property in 1888, as well as the seminary and a retirement home for senior adults, to advance Cuban Baptists' mission.

Then in 1959 after the Castro-led revolution, WCBC churches were persecuted as Cuba was declared an atheistic country until 1992 when it was formally changed to "secularist."

The Communist Party's initial crackdown on the spread of Christianity drew the Cuban Baptists together as they sought to survive in a hostile regime.

Despite such adversity, in recent years the work of the WCBC grew as leaders



ROOTS IN CUBA — Kevin Ezell (right), president of the North American Mission Board (NAMB), and John Sullivan (center), executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention, talk with pastor Homero Carbonell of Santa Clara, Cuba, prior to a session of the Western Cuba Baptist Convention's annual meeting in Calvary Baptist Church. The Havana church was purchased in 1888 by Southern Baptists' former Home Mission Board (now NAMB). Florida has a 15-year partnership with the Cuban convention. (BP photo courtesy of Florida Baptist Convention)

functioned under the government's regulations and restrictions by focusing on evangelism and church planting. While much freer to worship, the government will not allow Baptists to purchase new buildings for churches or ministries.

So it was the foresight of the HMB and Cuban Baptists in purchasing buildings before the 1960s that enabled the WCBC to prosper today. Ezell said it was "inspiring to see the passion and the vision of Annie Armstrong and others to purchase such property."

"They did then what they cannot do now," he said. Southern Baptists' gifts to the Annie Armstrong offering a century ago "gave them credibility and a sense of permanence that exists today."

The HMB continued to support the ministry in Western Cuba until 1987 when Southern Baptist work in Cuba was reassigned to the International Mission Board.

Former WCBC President Victor Gonzales, a layperson and respected oncologist at University Hospital in Havana, believes the past two years have been filled with advancements for the Gospel. "The work is doing better and better. We are still living in a revival," said Gonzales, who has mobilized the convention for the past five years by emphasizing prayer and church planting.

In the past two years, WCBC churches reportedly baptized 4,706 people and planted 60 new churches, bringing total membership to 23,000. The convention has 347 affiliated churches (churches officially recognized by the Communist Party) and at least 1,000 additional mis-

sions, house churches, houses of prayer, and cell churches.

The Holy Spirit is at work in Cuba today, Gonzales told the group. A 50-day prayer emphasis held annually from Easter to Pentecost is "bringing more people to Jesus every day and revival to Cuba."

The Eastern Cuba Baptist Convention, which until recently had been served by the American Baptist Convention, now relates to the International Mission Board (IMB). IMB missionary Kurt Urbanek said the two Cuba conventions consist of nearly 7,000 churches — 672 affiliated churches, 1,346 missions, and 4,901 house churches, houses of prayer, and cell churches.

The cooperation of the two Cuban Baptist conventions will be necessary to reach the 11 million Cubans for Christ, Gonzales said. With recent approval by the government to hold public rallies, even more focus will be given to church planting in the big cities, he said.

While in Cuba, Ezell and Sullivan visited Rebirth Church, a house church that meets in the three-bedroom apartment of pastor Humberto Leal. The Alamar apartments where Leal lives originally were built by the government as a model communistic community.

About 1,000 Cuban families reside in the multi-storied apartment buildings located about eight miles from downtown Havana.

The church was planted when one family residing in the massive apartment complex became Christians. At the family's request, a pastor from Havana rode his bicycle 10 miles each Sunday to lead worship in their home. The congregation grew

as neighbors were reached and even lent chairs for church members to use during worship and Bible study.

When the congregation grew to over 200, the government forced the church to downsize and disperse into several other apartments. Now five constituted churches are located in the apartment buildings, evangelizing and ministering to families throughout the community.

Leal's church serves as the official church and the umbrella for the other congregations. Each Sunday as many as 80 people attend Rebirth Church, holding Sunday School and new member classes in the bedrooms and small den while worshipping in the home's covered patio.

David Gonzales, WCBC liaison with the Florida convention, said this type of church multiplication is an example of what is taking place throughout Cuba, noting, "We are able to saturate and penetrate communities with the Gospel through this kind of hybrid church planting strategy."

The model is especially crucial today as the government will not allow new churches to be built or purchase property, Gonzales said. Even renovations of existing buildings must receive approval from the authorities, a long and tedious process.

The group also visited Getsemani Church in Guanabo, a seaside community east of Havana where 70 believers meet weekly in the backyard of a renovated carpenter's shop. With the words "Solo Cristo Salva" (Only Christ Saves) emblazoned across the front door, the church has started three house churches in the community, pastor Moisés Redondo said.

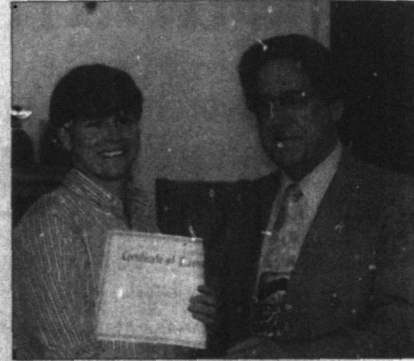
Just for the Record



CORNERSVILLE CHURCH, POTTS CAMP, held a baby dedication service Mar. 18. Shown are Robert Austin Rhea, his parents, Steve and Jessica, and pastor Joe Epling.



The Children in Action of **CONCORD CHURCH, BENTON-TIPPAH ASSOCIATION**, were instrumental in collecting food for the Good Samaritan Center, Ripley, and other mission projects. Shown are the children and leaders.



NESHOBA CHURCH, UNION, licensed Andrew Hanna to the ministry Mar. 25. Shown are Hanna and pastor Johnny Collins.

LAND

cont. from p. 1

Five USCIRF members were required to go off the panel March 22 under a new law.

The commission's congressional reauthorization, enacted in December, mandates term limits for commissioners.

The other commissioners whose service ended were Nina Shea, Felice Gaer, Elizabeth Prodromou, and Don Argue. Shea had served on the commission since its establishment in 1999, while Gaer, Prodromou, and Argue had been on the panel since 2001, 2004, and 2007, respectively.

The commission announced the following appointees will join the panel:

■ Robert George, jurisprudence professor at Princeton

University in New Jersey and a former member of both the President's Council on Bioethics and the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

■ Zuhdi Jasser of Phoenix, Az., a physician and president of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, which advocates for liberty rather than the establishment of an Islamic state.

■ Katrina Lantos Swett of Bow, N.H., president of the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights, which carries on the legacy of her father, the late California Congressman Tom Lantos.

Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives John Boehner, R-Oh., appointed George to the commission. U.S. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., named Jasser. U.S. Senate

Majority Leader Harry Reid, D.-Nev., selected Swett.

The other commissioners still on the panel are Azizah al Hibri, William Shaw, and Ted Van Der Meid. Leo's service will be terminated May 14, however, under the new law.

The commission issued its annual report March 20, and called on the State Department for the first time to designate Turkey and Tajikistan as CPCs.

USCIRF also recommended 14 other countries for CPC designation: Burma, China, Egypt, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.



RELIGIOUS LIBERTY PANEL — Richard Land (at podium), president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, gives part of a report by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom as other commissioners look on during a news conference in Washington. Land will be rotating off the religious liberty panel. (BP photo courtesy of USCIRF)

CLASSIFIEDS

FOR SALE: SIX-TIER LIGHTED PATRIOTIC "SINGING FLAG" (ELIZABETHTOWN, KY). Used for choir cantatas. Manufacturer's construction/lighting instructions included. Photos available. Contact John Rice (john@severnvalley.org) or call 270-765-7822.

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ONBSS OLBRA EUT CJCT.

VOBVBN EUTLM: CVFNL

Clue: F = G

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Mark Five: Thirty-four

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005

THE BaptistRecord

POLITICS

Attorney: churches can and should get involved in issues

Pastors are legally permitted to preach 'political' sermons

RALEIGH, N.C. (BP) — Voters in up to five states this year will vote on the definition of marriage — North Carolina's vote on May 8 is the first — and many churches already are involved, urging their members to stand up for the biblical definition of marriage as being between one man, one woman.

Still, many churches are hesitant to speak up, fearful that doing so is a violation of Internal Revenue Service (IRS) law and could endanger their tax-exempt status.

Erik Stanley, senior legal counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund, says that pastors and congregations have nothing to fear. Under IRS law, churches cannot endorse candidates but they can lobby for specific legislation, provided that the time and money spent doing so is less than five percent of their overall operation and budget, Stanley said.

"I cannot foresee any situation where a church would come anywhere close to violating that prohibition," Stanley told Baptist Press of the five percent limit. "Essentially, a church would have to devote itself almost wholeheartedly to lobbying efforts in order to be at risk."

"Consider everything that a church does, in terms of meeting time — just counting all the hours that a church meets every year — and then take five to 15 percent of that to devote to legislative and lobbying activities. No church is going to come anywhere close to that."

Stanley went one step further, saying that churches not only are allowed to take public stands on ballot initiatives, but they should do so. The Alliance Defense Fund is a Christian legal group.

"Without the voice of the church, marriage as it stands between one man and one woman is going to be lost in these five states and others," Stanley said. "This is just simply an area where churches don't need to be afraid of the IRS. The IRS allows them to be involved."

After North Carolina votes in May, Maine and Minnesota will follow in November. Maryland

and Washington state likely will be added to that November list when signature drives — expected to be successful — conclude.

The North Carolina and Minnesota amendments seek to define in the state constitutions marriage as between a man and a woman. Maine's vote is being promoted by homosexual rights groups and could legalize homosexual marriage. In Maryland and Washington, church groups and others are gathering signatures to try to reverse recently enacted laws that legalized homosexual marriage. Those laws have yet to take effect.

Stanley said pastors and churches can legally:

- gather signatures for petitions, even within the church building itself.
- urge members to support or oppose an initiative.
- hand out literature for or against an initiative.
- hold meetings geared specifically toward the initiative.
- preach sermons on the issue, urging members to vote a certain way.

Churches are categorized as 501(c)(3) organizations under IRS code, and as such are restricted in what they can do politically. They are absolutely prohibited from endorsing candidates, Stanley said, but are allowed to do an "insubstantial" amount of lobbying for issues.

Although insubstantial is not defined, one court defined it as five percent, another as 15%. To be safe, Stanley said, churches should stay within the five percent range.

"People think that a church is prohibited from doing anything that's considered lobbying, and that's just not true," Stanley said. "Churches can do a lot of things to support marriage amendments and other issues. They're not absolutely prohibited from doing that."

Mass. school under fire for removing 'God' from song

NEW YORK (BP) — Parents at a Massachusetts elementary school are furious after educators first removed the word "God" from the popular Lee Greenwood song, God Bless the U.S.A., and then pulled the song altogether from an upcoming concert.

Fox 25 in Boston reported that children at Stall Brook Elementary School in Bellingham were told to sing, "We love the U.S.A.," instead of "God Bless the U.S.A."

After parents started complaining, school officials removed the song from the school assembly concert. The school's principal released a statement to Fox 25 stating they hope to "maintain the focus on the original objective of sharing students' knowledge of the U.S. States, and because of logistics, will not include any songs."

Greenwood released a statement to Fox News criticizing the school's actions. "The most important word in the whole piece of music

is the word God, which is also in the title 'God Bless the U.S.A.," Greenwood said.

"Maybe the school should have asked the parents their thoughts before changing the lyrics to the song. They could have even asked the writer of the song, which I of course, would have said you can't change the lyrics at all or any part of the song."

Greenwood said the phrase "God Bless the USA" has a "very important meaning for those in the military and their families, as well as new citizens coming into our country." He said it's also played at naturalization ceremonies behind the national anthem.

"If the song is good enough to be played and performed in its original setting under those circumstances, it surely should be good enough for our children," Greenwood said.

An online poll taken by the television station indicated more than 80 percent of viewers were outraged by removing God from the song.

"I don't have a problem with the song," resident Patrick Grudier said. "I mean it's on our currency (God)."

Not everyone agreed — including parent Matthew Cote. "I don't think there's anything wrong with changing the song," he told the television. "It's a public school. If you want to have the word God in the song, go to a private school."

Reaction on Facebook has been overwhelmingly in favor of the traditional patriotic song. "Here we go again, more war on Christianity," wrote one Facebook user. "You can remove God all you want, but the good news — there is still a loving God and He lives."

Another Facebook user called it sad and disgusting. "I'd like to say unbelievable — but it is so totally believable."

Editor's note: This article first appeared at www.toddstarnes.com. Used by permission. Edited for style.

Crouchs' TBN network under accusations of financial wrongs

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP) — A \$50 million jet. Chauffeurs. Mansions in California and Florida. Clandestine affairs. Crimes and cover-up. Even a \$100,000 motor home for the pet dog.

These are just a few of the allegations directed against the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) and its directors in a pair of lawsuits filed in February by former employees of the nation's largest Christian broadcasting network.

The first lawsuit, filed on Feb. 1 in U.S. District Court in California, contains charges by Brittany Koper, the former chief financial officer of TBN and the granddaughter of founders Paul and Janice Crouch. Her lawsuit is not against TBN but against Davert & Loe, one of TBN's law firms.

Koper's suit says she discovered illegal activities when she became head of finance. Among the alleged activities: "the unlawful distribution of the TBN Companies' charitable assets to Trinity Broadcasting's directors," some of whom are Crouch family members. The suit says "these unlawful financial transactions" exceed \$50 million.

She took that information to Davert & Loe, seeking legal advice. The firm "acknowledged that the conduct in question was unlawful but nevertheless advised... Ms. Koper to perform and cover up such unlawful activities," according to the lawsuit.

The suit also says lawyers in the firm harassed her sexually. She seeks more than \$500,000 in damages.

The other lawsuit is against Trinity Christian Center of Santa Ana, one of TBN's corporate entities, as well as other TBN entities and Davert & Loe. Joseph McVeigh, Koper's uncle, says TBN sued him in retaliation against Koper. A judge dismissed TBN's claims against McVeigh, who now seeks legal fees and "punitive and exemplary damages."

Rusty Leonard, president of MinistryWatch.com, is not surprised by the allegations. "They have misled folks for an awfully long time," he said. "They've been the subject of more Donor Watches from MinistryWatch.com than any other ministry."

A Donor Watch is a warning not to contribute to a ministry until the problems identified in the Donor Watch are corrected.

TBN has a history of dodging bullets. The Los Angeles Times, MinistryWatch.com, and the Trinity Foundation, a ministry watchdog group, have all investigated TBN and have all published critical evidence, but with little effect.

TBN attorney Colby May told World News Service that the accusations of Koper and McVeigh regarding TBN are "bold faced lies." He accused Koper and her husband of embezzling and misappropriating money and property from TBN and International Christian Broadcasting (ICB), and said the lawsuits are attempts to divert attention from her wrongdoing.

Years of negative publicity may be one reason TBN finances have taken a turn for the worse. The organization still lists nearly \$800 million in assets, much of it in cash or other liquid assets, according to MinistryWatch.com — but deficits totaled more than \$18 million in 2010, the last year for which numbers are available, and assets fell by about \$30 million from 2009 to 2010 alone.

Editor's note: This article originally appeared in World News Service. Edited for style.

Easter is behind us, but death is still before us. In the beginning of 2012, a small town in Italy ran into a huge problem. Their cemetery was full. There were no more spots and no more ground to use for burial of any of the people in the town. To make the problem even worse, the people in a nearby town where people had gone to bury their loved ones got into a feud with the folks in the town who had no cemetery plots available and created problems so that they could not bury in the nearby town any longer. At this point things were getting desperate, so the mayor of the town takes the problem in hand and comes up with a solution. "We will outlaw death," he declared. And so he led the town to pass a law, resolution, or some kind of mandate that it was against the law for anybody in the town to die.

What a great idea! Why didn't someone think of that earlier? Surely a creative, innovative, initiative like that will soon reach some of our leaders and politicians and no doubt all across America laws will be passed making death illegal. Sometime later when the mayor of this town was being interviewed about this interesting law, he had to admit that some of the townspeople had already broken the law.

Now while this story may sound clever and cute, the real problem is not that we need to pass laws big enough, strong enough, and dramatic enough to curtail death but to recognize that life and death are not in our hands, but they are in God's hands. Hebrew 9:27 says, "It is appointed man once to die," and apart from the awesome intervention of the coming of Jesus every one of us will face death. Do what you will, eat what you like, exercise, rest, take your vitamins, get regular checkups, and ~~learn~~ to relax. Live in harmony with the world, laugh throughout the day, and still death will arrive. Often it will be unexpected, usually unannounced, and nearly always will be unwelcome, but death will come to each of us.

Here is a glorious truth that is proclaimed in the gospel story of Jesus



Outlaw Death

Christ. Death has been overcome. While the laws in Italy or anywhere else cannot stop death, Jesus Christ, God's Son, came to this earth, died on the cross for our sins, and was buried. Three days later He did not just cheat death He conquered death. He had declared that He was the resurrection and the life and whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Death has been overcome for every one of us in Christ.

Later when Paul was dealing with life and death issues he said, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 5:26). Isn't that absolutely glorious? God has not passed a law against death, but He has given a living Savior to conquer death. I find it fascinating that the Scripture says that the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. There are many enemies that hurt us and many that need to be overcome or even destroyed.

I suppose you could describe one of the enemies as undisciplined. There are so many areas of our lives that when we are not under a kind of God-guided discipline they can ruin us. Just think of all of the things that when they get out of control begin to destroy our

lives. See what begins to happen with things like eating, exercising, sleeping, smoking, or drinking get out of control and seriously damage us. Discipline with a spiritually touched balance in life is essential for us to live with purpose and meaning.

Another enemy that I have watched so often plague people is unforgiveness. Unforgiveness expresses itself in a person's life in high doses of poison that no one sees, and yet the individual who is experiencing it is gradually being killed. Life is being eroded because they do not forgive. It sounds like such an easy exercise to forgive someone, and yet dealing with the crucial issues of life and relationships, it is not only extremely difficult, but apart from an enormous measure of grace from God, it is impossible. There are times when I have seen strong Christian believers face a time and situation in their life where they just absolutely could not come to a place of forgiveness. Often I understand, but I still am amazed that they cannot or will not forgive. On the other hand, I have seen great Christian people dealing with situations in their

lives and they genuinely and lovingly forgive. Again, I am amazed.

Another enemy that rears its ugly head in our lives, often in our spiritual life and especially with people we know the best is simply described as unwilling. From a Biblical standpoint, it could be said and supported that God is always at work. He is always working in the depths of our lives and the outer reaches of our lives. Often He is pulling us along, prodding us to go in a certain direction, or loving us through the wrong directions that we have taken, but He is at work. But while He is always at work, it seems as though we are always looking for some way to express our unwillingness to do what He wants us to do. We are constantly coming to that moment like the rich young ruler who said, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus explained to him that there was one thing standing between him and obedience to God. Jesus said, "One thing thou lackest." At that crucial point while many other things may have been a part of his life, he was unwilling to obey.

So while you and I turn in every direction and find the enemies that would keep us from being what God wants us to be, the final and largest enemy that we face is death. Until death arrives we feel like we can address the other issues. Here is the bottom line fact. Whether it is these other things or death itself we have only one hope for victory, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He conquers our uncontrolled lives. He is the One who enables us to forgive. He alone is able to shape our hearts so that we will be obedient to God. Today turn to Him and allow Him to come and be the conqueror of all things in your life.

The author can be contacted at jfutral@mbcb.org.

Just for the Record



FIRST CHURCH, BELMONT, held a commissioning service for Matt Burks Mar. 25. Burks is serving in Ufa, Russia, through the IMB Journeyman program. Shown are Burks, left, and DeWayne Goodgine, pastor of First Church, Fyer, Tenn.



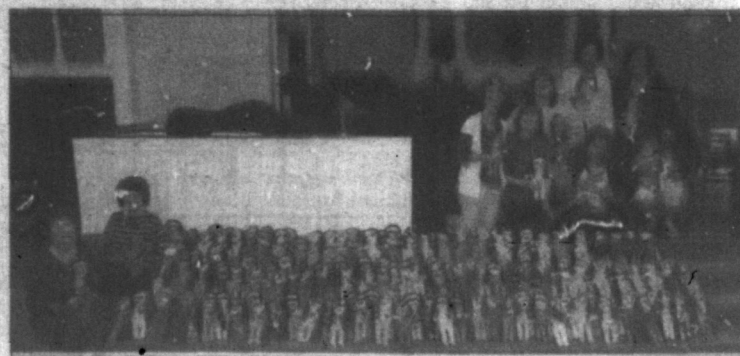
The ladies of **FIRST CHURCH, QUITMAN**, have completed their second generation of witness dolls. Over 350 dolls have been made and sent to Honduras, South Africa, Uganda, Trinidad, and the Philippines. Gene Neal, pastor.

FREENY CHURCH, CARTHAGE, recognizes its Bible Buddies, Children's Bible drillers, and Student Bible drillers.

In other Church News:

➤ **Old Hebron Church, Jefferson Davis County**, will host a Friday night Sing on Apr. 29 at 6 p.m., featuring music with Duke and Linda Barnes, followed by a fellowship.

➤ **Arlington Church, Bogue Chitto**, will host The Southern Plainsmen in concert May 6, 11 a.m., followed by dinner. A love offering will be received.



Just for the Record



Senior citizens from Baptist churches across Attala County attended the Senior Citizens Meeting at Central Hills Baptist Retreat near Kosciusko on Apr. 3. They were first entertained by Paul McGehee, Senior Adult Director of **ATTALA ASSOCIATION**, and then by Maura Fields, a singer/songwriter from Pontotoc. Approximately 160 senior citizens enjoyed the entertainment and the delicious meal that followed.



The State Keyboard Festival was held at **WOODLAND HILLS CHURCH, JACKSON**, Feb. 25.

ABOVE Summer Scholarship winners include: (back row) McKenzie Garrison, Piney Grove Church, Randolph; Satrina Massey, First Church, Bruce; Erin Wilson, Crossgates Church, Brandon; Lane Williamson, West Heights Church, Pontotoc; (front row) Diane Ward, Crossgates Church, Brandon; Rachel Ward, Crossgates Church, Brandon; Olivia Nicholson, First Church, McComb.

BELOW Adjudicators: Bob Knupp, Mississippi College; L. Darwin Brooks, Blue Mountain College; Kathy Vail, William Carey University; Angela Willoughby, Mississippi College; Howard Keever, William Carey University; and Worship Leader, Slater Murphy, Director, Church Music Department, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.



ABOVE: BETHESDA CHURCH, TERRY, licensed Andy Pepper to the ministry Sept. 18. Shown are pastor Robby Britt and Pepper.

BELOW: BETHESDA CHURCH TERRY, elected Jack Ramer as deacon. Shown are pastor Robby Britt and Ramer.



Truth is not relative

Find it in the One who is the way, truth, and life.

Simply share the following prayer with God.

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. I have sinned.

2. I want forgiveness for my sins.

and freedom from eternal death. I repent.

3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the

grave to forgive my sins and to restore

my relationship with you.

4. I believe in Jesus.

5. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life.

From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship

with Him. I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.

6. I want to know you better. Give me the right to become a child of

your Father in Heaven. Help me to be holy in my heart, mind, and

body. Amen. (This is the first of a series of prayers for new converts.)

Revivals & Homecomings

► **New Fellowship Church, Hickory:** 90th anniversary, Apr. 29; worship, 11 a.m., followed by lunch.

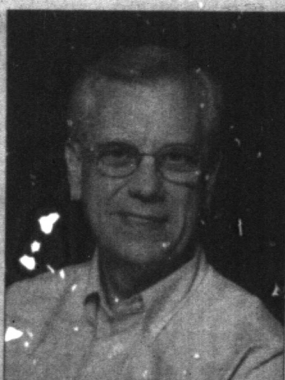
► **Harrisville Church, Harrisville:** Revival, Apr. 22-25; Sun., 10 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., 7 p.m.; Jim Futral, speaker; Tim Moak, music; for more information, call 601.847.1593.

► **Calvary Church, Columbia:** Homecoming, Apr. 22, 10 a.m.; Chad Davis, speaker; Gerald Simmons, music.

Staff Changes

Diana Chandler of New Orleans has been named as staff writer for Baptist Press, the news service of the Southern Baptist Convention, effective Mar. 26. Chandler has been a freelance writer since 2008. Her work for Baptist Press has included coverage of last year's hurricane-related flooding in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. She also contributed to a series of stories on Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program in 2009. A native of Laurel, she holds a master's degree in journalism from Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., and an undergraduate degree in journalism from the University of Southern Mississippi.

College News



Business executive Dan Grafton (left) and longtime Southern Baptist leader Jerry Rankin (right) will be among **MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE's** spring 2012 graduation speakers. Both are MC graduates. The retired president and CEO of Vertex Aerospace LLC based in Madison, Grafton will speak to Graduate School ceremonies at 7 p.m. on May 4 at the A.E. Wood Coliseum. Jerry Rankin, the president emeritus of the International Mission Board, will speak to two MC graduations on May 5. The Tupelo native will address the School of Christian Studies and the Arts, the School of Business and the School of Education at 10 a.m. in the A.E. Wood Coliseum. Rankin, who is now a Christian Studies instructor at his alma mater in Clinton, will also speak at 2 p.m. ceremonies that Saturday afternoon for the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and the School of Science and Mathematics. Beth Tinnon, the academic coordinator at the Mississippi College School of Nursing, will speak to nursing graduation ceremonies on May 4 in Swor Auditorium. The program begins at 11 a.m.

Bettye Rogers Coward (shown at right), who will soon retire as president of **BLUE MOUNTAIN COLLEGE**, will be the guest of honor at the 2012 BMC Alumni Association Banquet scheduled for 6:30 p.m., April 19 in Ray Dining Hall. Coward, who has spent more than 40 years in Mississippi higher education, will end her 11-year tenure as Blue Mountain's seventh president on June 31. Tickets for the fundraiser banquet are \$50 each. For more information and to make reservations call (662) 685-4771 extension 119 or extension 131.



A dozen **BLUE MOUNTAIN COLLEGE** students were installed as members of the 2012-13 Student Body Association Council. Seated (left to right) are: Abby Wade, Euzelian Representative, Memphis; Ashleigh Moss, Koinonia Representative, Collierville, Tenn.; Jamie Wagner, Secretary-Treasurer, Selmer, Tenn.; and Hannah Forsythe, Baptist Student Union Representative, Selmer, Tenn. Standing are: Macy Watkins, Eunomian Representative, Potts Camp; Jon Logan Little, Ekklesian Representative, New Albany; Spencer Hansen, Berean Representative, Atoka, Tenn.; Jon Baker, President, Dumas; Ryan Reed, Ministerial Association Representative, Pocahontas, Tenn.; Brad Smith, Commuter Representative, New Albany; and Shelby Sexton, Modenian, Representative, Moss Bluff, La.



Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if submitted as a JPEG file via either e-mail, CD or DVD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items are generally not publishable. Photographs cannot be returned. Please do not attach photos with tape or staples.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis.

Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistreccor@mbcb.org.

NADARKHANI

cont. from p. 1

"Brazil has a working relationship with Iran on a daily basis," Sekulow said. "The Brazilian government has really taken this case — senators, the executive branch, the people of Brazil — and it's such a key diplomatic partner for Iran."

In March, Iran acknowledged to the U.N. Human Rights Council meeting in Switzerland that Nadarkhani was charged with faith-based crimes. Specifically, Iran's human rights representative, Mohammad-Javad Larjani, said Nadarkhani was charged with telling youth about Christ without their parents' permission, leading an illegal house church in his home, and offending Islam.

"He offended Islam by saying that Jesus was the only way to heaven," Sekulow said.

Sekulow urged the rest of the

world to continue praying for Nadarkhani while also recognizing that the American view of courts and jails is meaningless in Iran.

"He has the death sentence hanging over his head and the question now is, does Iran try to push this to another trial — try a new judicial process to stall the issue because of the international pressure? That's where we're focused now. We have gotten so much of the world's attention," Sekulow said. "I think we have to get past the goal of just keeping him alive, and figure out how to get him to be released."

Sekulow's group raised the alarm about Nadarkhani's case in February, fearing his execution was imminent. The execution did not occur but does not mean that it was not scheduled, Sekulow said. Iran has a history of scheduling an execution to see if the information leaks, he pointed out.

"If it doesn't [leak], they may

carry it out, and that's what happened the last time they did this."

Iran last carried out an execution for apostasy in 1990.

"He's not doing this to be some worldwide martyr that everyone knows about," Sekulow said. "He really is representing hundreds if not thousands of people who are in the same situation."

In September, Nadarkhani was given four chances to recant his faith in court and refused each time. His case then was referred to the ayatollah. The American Center for Law and Justice reported one of his court exchanges.

"Repent means to return. What should I return to? To the blasphemy that I had before my faith in Christ?" Nadarkhani asked.

"To the religion of your ancestors, Islam," the judge reportedly replied. "I cannot," the pastor responded.

Masters champ wears Christianity for all to see

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP) — There's something different about Bubba Watson, and he doesn't care if you know it.

The winner of the 2012 Masters golf tournament realizes he's not like most famous athletes. In fact, he welcomes it.

"People always ask 'Why is Bubba different?'" said Watson during a pre-Masters phone interview from Scottsdale, Ariz. "They're just trying to figure it out."

Watson's identity is not wrapped up in his freakishly long drives from his lanky 6-foot-3, 180-pound left-handed swing — he leads the Tour with a 315-yard average. Rather, take one look at his Twitter profile and you may figure out what's different about Watson:

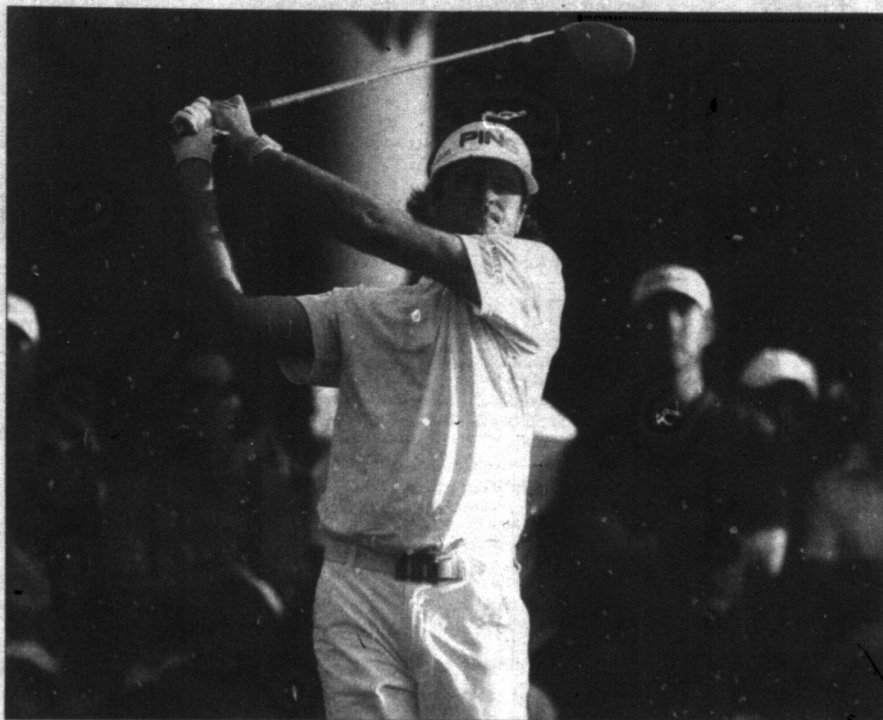
@bubbawatson: Christian. Husband. Daddy. Pro Golfer. Owner of General Lee 1."

Watson is an outspoken Christian golfer and he uses his Twitter account — along with his platform as one of the PGA Tour's magnetic personalities — to share about his faith in Christ.

"For me, it's just showing the Light," the 33-year-old said. "There's people who want to put down Christians. I try to tell them Jesus loves you. It's just a way to be strong in my faith."

Speaking to the Augusta, Ga., crowd and a TV audience after he won the Masters, he thanked "my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." His first Tweet after he won the Masters read simply: "To God Be the Glory!!!"

In April 2011, just before teeing off on the final round of the Masters, Watson took advantage of his social media platform to Tweet out two Bible verses on Sunday morning. He followed that up talking about his faith, his relationship with God, Tweeting out more verses and the impact of Christian artists on his iPod.



CHANGED — Masters golf tournament winner Bubba Watson credits his Christian faith for turning him from an angry golfer to a calmer golfer. He's also outspoken about his faith, crediting "my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" after his win. He regularly uses his Twitter account to discuss Christianity. (BP photo courtesy of Augusta National Golf Club)

Some started complaining about his 140-character witnessing tactics, but Watson's response was simple: Feel free to unfollow, but the talk about God wasn't going away. Some 100 people quit following him and in true Bubba style, he reached out and wished them well with goodbye notes.

The past month more Christian haters have tried to derail Watson's testimony — or as he mildly puts it, "write bad stuff," but Watson doesn't take offense even when it's the sole intent.

When someone tells him "Your God Tweets are lame," Watson responds with, "I will pray for you and ur family."

Among the 39,000-plus mes-

sages he's sent into the Twitter-sphere, he's sure to spread the Gospel message: "God made everything & saved us from our sins & gives us hope and gives us eternal life! #Godisgood"

Sometimes he'll Tweet out some of his favorite verses: "Hebrews 13:6 So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?' or he'll use his PGA platform — like the day after taking the lead with a headline-grabbing 10-under-par 62 at the Cadillac Championship in March — to bring God into the mainstream conversation.

Watson's Tweet before his third round: "The most impor-

tant thing in my life? Answer after I golf 18 holes with @Justin-Rose99. #Godisgood" Later that day: "Most important things in my life — 1. God 2. Wife 3. Family 4. Helping others 5. Golf"

"Lecrae said it the best," Watson said of the Christian rapper he listens to on his iPod. "He doesn't want to be a celebrity. He doesn't want to be a superstar. He just wants to be the middle man for you to see God through him."

As golf's official major season bloomed during the week of the Masters, and Watson winning a major for the first time — only his fourth PGA Tour career victory — Watson seemed like a long shot. His best finish at Augusta National had been a tie for 20th in 2008.

Winning is no longer everything for Watson. There was a time in his life where drives slicing into the thick, five-inch rough or birdie putts rimming out would get the best of him and his blood pressure.

Watson will tell you, Angry Bubba was not a good look. Unbecoming, for sure. "I was so wrapped up in 'Why am I not winning?'" Watson said. "It created frustrations in my head and in my life."

Things got so heated on the golf course that Ted Scott, his caddie since 2006, finally gave him an ultimatum. "My caddie finally stepped up and said, 'You're going to have to change, or I'm going to quit,'" Watson said.

Watson's temper-laced decorum was replaced with what some call "Bubba Golf," which stresses golf mechanics less and puts a heavy focus on just playing golf and having fun on the course.

It's working. Watson won the Travelers Championship in June of 2010, the Farmer's Insurance Open in January of 2011, and the Zurich Classic a few months later.

In March, Watson led the Cadillac Championship after 54 holes before fading in the final round, missing a nine-foot putt by inches on the final hole that would have forced a play-off. Old Bubba may have let that one fester for weeks. New Bubba brushed it off with a satisfied smile and slight head-tilt.

Watson credits three strong believers — Scott, along with his trainer Adam Fisher ("Fish") and Watson's wife Angie — as the difference in his attitude.

"I've really got a good team around me trying to help me succeed," said Watson, who has long supported many charities, including the upcoming Bubba's Bash and the infamous Golf Boys video project. "Not just in golf, but off the golf course, [I want] to be a light for Jesus."

Perhaps the most powerful Christian impact Watson has experienced has been the PGA Tour's weekly Bible study, held every Wednesday night during tournament weeks. Rickie Fowler, Matt Kuchar, Zach Johnson, Jonathan Byrd, and Webb Simpson, along with Watson, are some of the regulars, with attendance ranging from 16 to 50 on a given week.

"For me it's a way to get back connected with the Bible and with God and Jesus," Watson said. "Now you know other people you can talk to, ask questions to, tell them what you're thinking, tell them what's going on in your life."

Editor's note: This article appears courtesy of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and was originally posted online at BillyGraham.org. Edited for style.

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Arkansas Baptist Children's Homes (ABCHomes) is seeking houseparent couples for the Baptist Home in Monticello, Ark., Boys Ranch in Harrison, Ark., and the Emergency Receiving Home in Judsonia, Ark. These full-time positions include salary, medical insurance, life insurance and paid leave. For information: Children's Home, contact Randy Luper 870.367.5358 or rluper@abchomes.org; Boys Ranch, contact Bill VanderMeiden 870.741.5784 or bvandermeiden@abchomes.org; Judsonia Emergency shelter, contact Sean Culpepper 501.455.8554 or sculpepper@abchomes.org

ABCHomes is seeking a case manager for the Baptist Home in Monticello. Contact Luper, 870.367.5358 or rluper@abchomes.org.

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GIFTS OF HONOR AND MEMORY

A portion of The Village View is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups add individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to further honor with taste and respect those who have been special to our special friends.

JANUARY 2012

MEMORIALS

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James & Claire Gibbs
Mr. Charlie Johnson
Ruth SSC, Hurley BC
Mr. Robert M. Johnson
Mrs. Joy B. Roberts
Mrs. Bernice Johnston
Mr. & Mrs. James C. Steele
Mrs. Betty Jones
Eldon & Bonnie Pitts
Mrs. Jean Jones
Curtis & Kaye Buchanan
Rev. Robert E. Jones
Ms. Carolyn B. Pittman
Rev. Robert L. Jones
Jean & Glynn Jones
Mr. Jerry Jordan
Robert & Marilyn Dillard
Mary Walton Keith
The Keith Family
Mary Ann Knox
Stanton BC, Natches
Arthur (Bubba) Lawler
Mr. & Mrs. Joe Heranney Sr.
Joy Lofton
David & Jo Ellen Doss
W. R. "Chubby" Lowery
Bobbie Ehrhardt
Sarah Mae Rice
Ms. Bonnie Hall
Mr. Dan Magee
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Willie & Bettie Ratliff
Ruth SSC, Petal-Harvey BC

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Ms. Vickie Hancock
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Mrs. Darthy T. Whitten
Mrs. Lona M. Southerland
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Louise & Willis Bethay
Mr. Jim Newton
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THE BAPTIST CHILDREN'S VILLAGE

Christianity 103: Meet Needs • Luke 9:1-50

Do you remember the scene in the movie "Field of Dreams" when Kevin Costner's brother-in-law is mocking the family for sitting at the baseball field doing nothing? Then, after "Doc" steps off the field to come to the aid of the little girl, you can hear the brother-in-law in the background asking when all the baseball players got there? As the audience, we knew they were there but because of his obsessive need for the world to make sense, the brother-in-law could not. It was easier for his mind to abandon reason and logic than to admit there were things that were bigger than he was. In the film, only those that were willing to believe that world is not one dimensional and fully logical are able to enjoy the game. That is Hollywood, but even in real life, the boundaries of control, order, and logic can rob us of our ability to enjoy it.

In this week's lesson the writer asks us to explore ways that we may have closed our minds to God rather than admit our failures and weakness. It is expected of unbelievers but every believer also has Biblical truths we ignore rather than acknowledge that God expects more of us. It is more comfortable to think of a God that supports our definition of "reasonable" and "unreasonable" than one that pushes us to go ever further for the sake of His Kingdom.

Notice Needs, Luke 9:10-12. Far too often, we are Kevin Costner's brother-in-law, praying in our churches for prospects while oblivious to the hum of lawn mowers and the cars streaming up and down our streets during service time. We ask God to send us to the needy that we drive past on our way to and from church impulsively rolling up our windows and locking our doors as we do. When the disciples looked out at what

could have been 10,000 people or more, they saw a monster crowd that should have planned better. There are thousands of them and thirteen of us. It is just not reasonable to expect us to provide for so many, even with Jesus on our team.

Take Action, Luke 9:13-17. When Jesus looked at the exact same crowd, He saw people that had come out of their homes and towns to listen to Him. To Jesus, the math was simple: They have a need + God

has placed me here and made me aware of it = I am to meet that need. (See John 5:19-23) From the Biblical perspective, it makes perfect sense. 13 to 10,000 is a reasonable challenge because the victory is all the sweeter. In his book "Experiencing God" Henry Blackaby reminds us, when we recognize that

someone else hurts or has needs, THAT IS God's invitation to get involved especially, when the odds are humanly impossible.

Explore the Bible

with Kelly Mitchell



Faith is not grown from tasks we feel up to. Faith grows from completing God-sized tasks.

Trust God, Luke 9:37-43A. I pastor a small and wonderful church that God placed in one of the poorest counties in the poorest state in our country. It is massively overwhelming to look around our community and take inventory of the need. There is no way that our membership or our coffers can make a dent but what church can?

Who of us has a cure for drug or alcohol addiction, unwed mothers, or fatherless households? Who can solve the problem of gangs and crime? Who can break the cycle of poverty? No one! But that is the good news.

Any competent professional will assure you that you do not cure these problems; the sufferer has to want to come out of these circumstances. The true need is not poverty, addiction, or crime, it is spiritual. We cannot feed, clothe, or treat them all but we can share the truth of Jesus. Only with a circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:29 HCSB) can these problems be adequately addressed.

For discussion: Jesus did not ignore the physical needs of those that came out to receive His instruction, how will He respond to those that go out to share His instruction? When will we ever feel like we have enough people and enough resources to tackle problems in our community? What need in your church or community is God showing your class? Based on the answers to these three questions, what is God asking you to do today?

Mitchell is pastor of Main Street Church, Goodman.

Jesus Lives in Believers • Gal. 2:19b-21; Gal. 2:20-21; Rom. 6:1-7; John 15:1-5

We Are Crucified With Christ

Galatians 2:19b-21; KJV Galatians 2:20-21

What does our lesson title, "Jesus Lives in Believers", really mean? We've learned this month that Jesus was crucified, died, was buried, and most importantly...He arose and lives. He's alive!! But, He doesn't live in every person. We must first become believers in Jesus Christ. We do that by asking Him to forgive us for our sins. He will. We trust Him when He says we will live forever.

Our faith grows as we read our Bible. It grows more as we talk to God (pray). Talking to God means we tell God things then listen as He speaks and assures us with answers. The more we contact Jesus, the more we allow Him to come into and be a part of our lives. We soon realize that we have become a part of His crucifixion, resurrection and His life. When we acknowledge this concept, we no longer live to ourselves and what we want. We earnestly want to please God with everything we say and do.

I hope you have heard the song recorded by Phillips, Craig and Dean, entitled "Crucified With Christ." It begins by a person looking at their former life before salvation, then recognizing

how alive they felt later as a Believer in Christ. The words and tune of the chorus will stay in your memory for days. Chorus: "For I am crucified with Christ and yet I live, Not I but Christ that lives within me. His cross will never ask for more than I can give, For it's not my strength but His. There's no greater sacrifice for I am crucified with Christ and yet I live."

We Are Raised With Christ

Romans 6:1-7

In Romans chapter five, Paul is speaking to the Romans about the mission of Christ. "Christ died for the ungodly" (verse 6). He went on to explain that "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He continued, His death and resurrection provided grace which is Christ's free and undeserved love gift that guarantees eternal life. The audience wondered, "What are you saying? Since grace is such a good thing, should we go on sinning so we can

receive more of God's grace?" At this point, I'd liked to have seen Paul's expression and body language. But, he continued steadily explaining how they should feel once they had become believers. We should NOT habitually practice sinning. When we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into His death and resurrection through the glory of the Father unto new life.

I love to hear my pastor-husband when he baptizes someone. He leans the candidate back and says: "Dead to sin and buried with Christ (they are immersed in the water). Bringing them up he says: "Raised to walk in the newness of life!" Most congregations clap to welcome them into their church.

Such a beautiful picture of the new Believer joining Christ in His death and resurrection.

We Are Pro-Active With Christ

John 15:1-5

The Fall season of the year is always beautiful and amazing to me. I grew up

in South Florida where trees, bushes and grass were green all year. Changing seasons means special care for all growing plants and trees in our yard in Tomba, Mississippi. It still seems strange to prune branches and limbs until they are so close to the ground. I always hope they are strong enough to recover and return. Our pink climbing rose usually exerts itself the fastest. The pruning really helps it to grow quicker and more plentiful than before. That example of God's creation is a good lesson as we learn what Jesus meant when He taught the disciples about the vine and the branches. The branches draw strength from the vine, so our staying close to Christ helps us to be productive and fruitful. "The fruit for the Christian is a Christlike life. It is the reproduction of those characteristics of life expressed in Jesus Christ himself." (Layman's Bible Book Commentary). Some of Jesus' words that are good to remember are: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener...Remain in me, as I also remain in you...I am the vine, you are the branches...Apart from me you can do nothing." That's the best reason for Jesus to live in believers!

Davis is a member of Fellowship Church, Meridian.

Bible Studies for Life

with Betty Davis



Mississippi evangelist indicted for secret videos, plea of 'not guilty' entered

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP and local reports) — A 33-year-old Mississippi evangelist who spoke for years at Southern Baptist youth gatherings is being investigated in three states for video voyeurism.

Sammy Nuckolls of Olive Branch was indicted in Feb-

ruary in Mississippi on 13 counts of video voyeurism for filming women in private situations without their consent. Each count carries a maximum sentence of five years and will require Nuckolls to register as a sex offender.

He has pleaded not guilty to the Mississippi charges. A trial is scheduled to begin June 25.

Nuckolls is married, and neighbors said he and his wife adopted a baby last year.

Nuckolls came under investigation in October while staying in

the home of a Gosnell, Ark., minister during a speaking engagement in the minister's church. He allegedly recorded the minister's wife in the bathroom, using a digital video camera disguised as a writing pen. The minister's wife discovered the pen was actually a

camera and contacted local police.

A search of Nuckolls' computer allegedly turned up numerous instances of secret recordings in several locales, leading to the charges in Mississippi and prompting further investigations in Arkansas and Texas.

Poll charts pastors' opinions on Mormons

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Most pastors feel strongly that Mormons are not Christians, according to a survey by LifeWay Research.

The survey polled 1,000 American Protestant pastors and asked them to respond to the statement: "I personally consider Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) to be Christians."

Three-quarters (75%) disagree with the statement, including 60% who strongly disagree and 15% who somewhat disagree. Just 11% somewhat agree, six percent strongly agree and nine percent do not know.

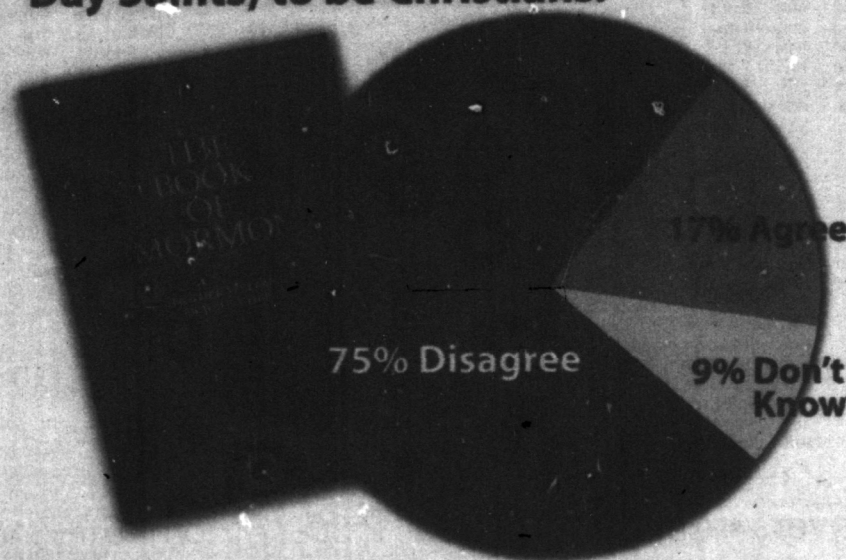
"Though pastors believe overwhelmingly that Mormonism is not Christianity, their opinions should not be [viewed as] personal scorn for Mormons," said Ed Stetzer, vice president of research and ministry development at LifeWay Christian Resources. "A person can respect a religious group and even appreciate their commitment to traditional moral values without equating their beliefs with Christian orthodoxy."

Mormonism has come into the public eye in recent years with the rise of prominent adherents like Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, U.S. Senate majority leader Harry Reid, and conservative talk show host Glenn Beck.

According to a 2009 study by the Pew Research Center, Mormons comprise 1.7% of the U.S. adult population and 58% of Utah's population — the state founded by early Mormon leaders. In comparison, evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics each make up about a quarter of the U.S. population (26% and 24%, respectively).

Seventy-six percent of the U.S. Mormon population is concentrated

Among American Protestant pastors
"I personally consider Mormons
(Church of Jesus Christ of Latter
Day Saints) to be Christians."



Note: Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.

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in the West, with 35% in Utah, 13% in California and seven percent in Idaho.

In the Pew study's measure of intensity of religious belief and practice, Mormons ranked higher than evangelical Protestants,

Catholics, and mainline Protestants. A full 83% of Mormons say religion is very important in their lives, compared with 56% of the general population. Three-quarters of Mormons (76%) attend church at least once a week,

compared with 39% of the general population.

In the LifeWay Research survey, pastors' self-identification as either mainline or evangelical was a predictor of their opinions regarding Mormons. While

two-thirds (67%) of evangelicals strongly disagree that Mormons are Christians, just 48% of mainline pastors feel the same way.

Mainline pastors are more likely than their evangelical counterparts both to strongly agree that Mormons are Christians (nine percent to three percent) and to somewhat agree (16% to nine percent).

Pastors 65 and older are the least likely age bracket to strongly disagree that Mormons are Christians, with 48% holding that opinion.

Pastors whose highest education level is not beyond a bachelor's degree are more likely to be unsure about Mormons than pastors who hold a graduate degree. While 16% of those with no more than a bachelor's degree are unsure whether Mormons are Christians, just five percent with a graduate degree are unsure.

"Individuals holding to the Mormon faith are in the news in politics, entertainment, and sports," Stetzer said. "It is inevitable that pastors will be approached with questions from their parishioners regarding the Mormon belief system. All ministers would do well to learn about Mormonism and have an answer ready for their congregations."

The phone survey sampled randomly selected Protestant churches. Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister, or priest of the church called. Responses were weighted to reflect the geographic distribution of Protestant churches.

The completed sample of 1,000 phone interviews provides a 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed $\pm 3.2\%$. Margins of error are higher in subgroups.

Obama plugs Planned Parenthood; babies saved elsewhere

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — U.S. President Barack Obama recently reaffirmed his abortion rights advocacy by providing a video message filmed from The White House to supporters of the country's leading provider of the lethal procedure.

In a message that appeared on Planned Parenthood Action Fund's YouTube page, Obama promised to work throughout his presidency to protect government funding for the organization. The president said he knows Planned Parenthood "will continue providing care no matter what. I know you'll never stop fighting to protect the health care and the choices that America's women deserve. As long as I have the privilege of being your president, neither will I."

He also said, "[O]ver the past year, you've had to stand

up to politicians who wanted to deny millions of women the care they rely on and inject themselves into decisions that are best made between a woman and her doctor."

The action fund is the advocacy and political arm for Planned Parenthood.

The U.S. House of Representatives voted last year to eliminate federal funds for Planned Parenthood, but the Senate defeated the proposal.

Planned Parenthood affiliates reported performing 329,445 abortions in 2010, the latest year for which statistics are available. Planned Parenthood and its affiliates received \$487.4 million in government grants, contracts, and reimbursements alone in 2009-10.

A subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives' Energy and Commerce Committee is conducting an investigation

into Planned Parenthood's policies and practices. Undercover investigations by pro-life organizations in recent years have shown Planned Parenthood employees demonstrating a willingness to aid self-professed sex traffickers whose prostitutes supposedly were in their early teens; seeking to cover up alleged child sex abuse; and agreeing to receive donations designated exclusively for abortions of African American babies.

Meanwhile, more than 700 unborn children were saved from abortion in the 40 Days for Life campaign that concluded April 1.

As of April 3, 40 Days leaders had received reports of 718 babies rescued in the latest effort. The reported number of babies saved likely will increase as more reports come in. The effort, which began in

Texas in 2004 and went national in 2007, has received reports of more than 5,700 unborn lives saved as a result of its campaigns.

The 40-day effort, which focuses on peaceful, pro-life prayer vigils outside abortion clinics, was the largest spring campaign in 40 Days for Life's history, with initiatives in 258 cities in the United States, plus sites in Canada, Australia, England, Ireland, and Spain.

Shawn Carney, 40 Days campaign director, reported the following developments in the last week of the campaign:

■ Three more abortion clinic workers left their jobs, bringing this spring's total to eight and the overall total since 2007 to 69.

■ A 40 Days volunteer in Charlotte, N.C., reported five

more babies saved for a total of 46 during the spring campaign.

■ A 40 Days volunteer at an unnamed location shared the following testimony: "I had my first abortion at age 14 and hardly knew what it meant — then another through the following years, still not understanding that it was true lives being terminated. When a friend talked me out of a fourth at age 23, it was the best thing my friend could have done. My one and only son is now 18 and graduating high school. It was the best decision I ever made."

■ A participant in Pensacola, Fla., said five more children were saved at the city's only abortion clinic.

The semi-annual 40 Days campaigns consist of 40 days of prayer and fasting to end abortion, as well as community outreach and the prayer vigils outside clinics.